

AFFIDAVIT

My name is [REDACTED]. I am a poultry inspector with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS). I am submitting this affidavit freely and voluntarily to Alyssa Doom, who has identified herself to me as an investigator for the Government Accountability Project. I am doing so without any threats, inducements or coercion. I authorize the publication of this statement contingent upon the redaction of my name, and the name and specific location of the establishments to which I refer. This statement evidences my concern over chemical use and extreme temperature conditions in poultry processing plants. I believe these factors are creating an environment that contributes to serious health problems for government inspectors and plant employees.

I have worked in the poultry industry for over 27 years and as an inspector for over 20 of these years. Most recently, I have worked in a [REDACTED] processing facility, where I have been stationed for 14 years. In my line of work, my primary responsibility is to inspect the birds on processing lines to ensure that they are safe for human consumption. Throughout my career I have received high ratings by the FSIS. I have also received awards for superior job performance. I believe that, based on the quality of my work and my many years of experience in the inspection service, I can provide a credible account of the health problems that are being created by chemicals and temperature conditions in processing plants. My observations below are

based on my experiences in the [REDACTED] plants, as well as my general knowledge from over 20 years of work with the USDA.

1. Chemicals Use in Poultry Processing Plants

Approximately 6 years ago, the [REDACTED] plant changed their processing procedures from "offline processing" to "online processing". In offline processing, when contamination was detected on birds they were brought away from the main processing line to be reprocessed for the removal of imperfections, such as fecal matter. With the alternative, online processing, came an increase in the use of chemicals in plants. In online processing, contaminated carcasses remain on the processing line with the other birds, and all birds on the line are sprayed with a product called [REDACTED], which is supposed to aid in sufficiently cleaning them. At my rank, I am not allowed to know the chemical makeup of the products plants use, such as [REDACTED]. I am also not informed when the plants switch the chemicals they use. My fellow inspectors and I only know that the products have been, according to the plant, FDA approved. The companies tell us that the chemicals are not going to hurt us and to do our jobs without asking questions. It is my personal belief that the use of [REDACTED] has been detrimental to inspector and plant employees' health.

When the plant began using [REDACTED], they also began increasing the amount of chlorine they used in the chiller, which is a point at the end of the processing line where chickens are immersed in a large

vat of a chlorine-water mixture to chill the carcasses. In the case that the [REDACTED] does not eliminate all contaminants on a bird on the processing line, it is assumed that the boost in chlorine in the chill tank will remove any remaining fecal matter or ingesta. Before the company began using [REDACTED], my fellow inspectors and I would have only occasionally known that chlorine was used in the plant because we rarely smelled it. Now the smell has become so strong we can taste it. We have also begun experiencing serious health problems, which are detailed below.

In addition to [REDACTED] and chlorine, I believe there are many other dangerous chemicals used in the plant. For example, the company uses various chemicals to clean the facility, which are neutralized with vinegar. Furthermore, poor ventilation in the plant negatively contributes to the problems with chemical use. There are large vents in the ceiling that are supposed to circulate air, but these do not seem to work sufficiently.

Finally, I am concerned that the chemicals used on poultry may be detrimental to consumers. Based on the impacts that they seem to be having on the health of inspectors, I do not believe that products treated with these chemicals are safe for human consumption. I think there is a clear link between the use of chemicals in the plants, and the health problems that are becoming increasingly worse in me, my fellow inspectors, and the plant employees.

2. Temperature Extremes

I am certain that temperature extremes in plants contribute to our health problems. Working in the plants during the winter and summer months is especially uncomfortable. Extreme temperatures strengthen the potency of chemical scents, make it difficult to breathe, intensify symptoms of arthritis, and seem to greatly contribute to general body aches and pains. Inspectors and plant employees typically become very ill in the winter and summer months. This was not always the case. Previously, plants provided heaters for inspectors during the winter months and fans to cool us during the summer months. Now heaters and fans in some plants have been removed despite temperatures reaching over 100 degrees in the summer and below 40 degrees in the winter. Working for 8 or 9 hours at a time in these drastic temperatures makes our jobs very difficult and we dread coming to work. I believe that if the company reestablished means of heating and cooling there would be a major change in the health of inspectors and plant employees, particularly during the summer and winter months.

3. Retaliatory Nature of Supervisors and Companies

Some of the changes made to the measures used to mitigate temperature extremes seem to have been made as retaliation following inspectors' noncompliance write-ups. For example, when noncompliance reports were written about condensation in plants, to fix the problem, the plants took away those fans used to cool inspectors during extreme heat—and inspectors were told they would now be used to prevent condensation. It is very miserable without these fans and our USDA supervisors will not do anything to make inspectors more comfortable.

It seems that they basically go along with any decisions the company makes and ignore inspectors' requests for even small changes that would make our working conditions bearable. In some plants, supervisors have even told the company that the inspectors do not need heaters or fans. They used to fight for us, but not anymore. It now feels like we are constantly fighting an uphill battle with the company with very few positive results.

4. Personal Health Problems

I believe there is a very obvious link between my health issues and the extreme temperatures and increased use of chemicals in plants. I worked in 2 other plants before that did not use [REDACTED] and I never experienced most of the problems I am having now. Though my colleagues, friends, and family told me for years that my health issues stemmed from my working environment, I chose to ignore these claims because my sinus and respiratory problems began when I was [REDACTED] years old. However, after working in these plants for more than 27 years, I now realize that the scope of my health issues extends far beyond the minor sinus and respiratory problems I acquired [REDACTED]. It is clear that my work in the industry has significantly contributed to a decline in my health.

Because the company does not give us information about the effects of exposure to the various chemical combinations and extreme high and low temperatures present in plants, I can only assume that they are a major contributor to my health problems. The company and my supervisors will not admit that the temperatures and products being

used are dangerous, yet my doctor and his assistant agree that my work in the plants is harming my health.

My most prominent health problem relates to my sinus and respiratory functioning. During my time working in the industry, I have suffered from [REDACTED]. I also have major problems with my sinuses. [REDACTED].

These problems led me to develop [REDACTED]. Doctors were grasping at straws for something to help with my pain. A neurologist eventually put me on 3 medications to get me back on my feet, though as a consequence, I was out of work for 3 months on painkillers. The doctor hoped to eventually reduce or eliminate my medications, but after several years, I must still take the same dosage to control my pain. My doctor has assigned a nurse practitioner to work with me. She is so sympathetic to my situation that she has told me anytime I cannot work, I should call her and she will take me out of work for months at a time just to get me out of the plant environment.

2. Coworkers' Health Problems

Other inspectors have shared their health problems with me, and many of them say that doctors have specifically told them that work in the plant environment is severely detrimental to their health. Though I cannot say positively that everyone working in the plants is affected by the plant's conditions, I am certain that many of my fellow inspectors and others working in the plant experience health conditions similar to my own, including sinus infections, bronchitis,

asthma, and other respiratory problems. For example, my supervisor has terrible sinus problems, and is ill with a cold or sinus infection nearly all of the time. Some have also suffered from rashes or itching on their skin, which they and their doctors believe to be a result of the chemicals used in plants.

Our health conditions always become worse in the winter and summer when temperatures are most drastic. It seems that we are all aging much faster than normal, and getting through our shifts each day is a struggle. Many of my former co-workers are now on disability as a result of their health problems. If conditions continue along the current path, I believe many more inspectors and plant workers will be on disability before reaching retirement age. Though our doctors tell us that the chemicals used in plants are dangerous and detrimental to our health, we suffer through them because we want to keep our jobs. It is a shame that despite advances in modern technology, the systems used in processing facilities are increasingly harmful to human health.

The company employees themselves are exposed to the same uncomfortable and hazardous conditions as the inspectors. They are miserable, but are afraid to bring up their concerns due to fear of retaliation by the poultry companies. I believe they actually have it worse than the inspectors. For example, they do not even have warm water to wash their hands during the winter months, when temperatures are oftentimes near freezing inside the plants.

It is very important to me that I share my insight on the conditions of the plant I work in because the public must understand how critical it is that changes are made to protect the health of industry workers.

I, [REDACTED], have reviewed this statement of 8 pages and hereby declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief. Dated this ___ day of January, 2013.

(Signature)

Sworn and subscribed before me this ___ day of January, 2013.

(Notary Signature)